



**Special blend:** Jan O'Connor (left) and Maryanne Shearer. Picture: ROB BAIRD

## Just their cup of tea

By ANNIE LAWSON

JAN O'Connor will not divulge the secret herbs and spices that have helped launched her successful tea venture.

The tea connoisseur and her business partner Maryanne Shearer are wary of competitors finding the secret location of the European blending house that has helped earn their business Tea Too its unique reputation.

"They let us develop special blends with them, which is unusual," Ms O'Connor said.

The industrious pair have set out to convert Brunswick St's legion of coffee-drinkers with flavors such as pear,

chocolate green tea and quince, and mango with marigold blossom.

The business has blossomed since its inception two years, growing at a rate of 20 per cent a year.

But there have been a few hiccups.

Their recent move into the St Kilda market failed soon after they opened a second store in Fitzroy St.

"The shop was small and high maintenance," Ms O'Connor said.

"We normally like to do tastings and let people sniff and touch the drink."

The duo also have plans to

launch an assault on the health and spa industry with their vast range of teas and accessories.

Tea Too's non-retail business now generates 25 per cent of sales, with wholesale contributing 20 per cent and mail order and catalogues 5 per cent.

Ms O'Connor expects both segments to grow in importance.

She dismissed fears of rivals encroaching on their stable of customers.

"Our competitors have taken a different approach," she said. "We've gone more modern and contemporary but they're appealing to an established customer."